

Statement of Rep. Christopher H. Smith
Markup of H.Res. 199
Subcommittee on Africa, Human Rights and International Operations

This resolution expresses the sense of the House of Representatives regarding the horrific massacre at Srebrenica in July 1995. I introduced House Resolution 199 on April 6, and it presently has 15 additional co-sponsors. The Senate version, S.Res. 134, was introduced by Senator Gordon Smith.

To begin, let me make a few small comments on this resolution. Last week, at full committee, Under Secretary of State Nick Burns noted the 10th anniversary of Srebrenica is upon us. He mentioned specifically that this slaughter of approximately 8,000 men and boys who had sought refuge in that UN-declared safe haven represented the worst atrocity in Europe since World War II. Just yesterday, another State Department official responsible for Balkan affairs also raised the anniversary at a Helsinki Commission hearing I attended. Clearly, our government is taking note of this event, and the House needs to be part of that effort.

Srebrenica survivors are a closely knit group. This is quite understandable considering the horror they experienced. They have waited long enough to know the fate of their missing friends and relatives. They are eager for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. The Srebrenica survivors, many of whom came to the United States as refugees and are now American citizens, know about this resolution, and this action by the Congress is important to them. It might help them find closure. Just last week I met with the Bosnian Prime Minister, and he expressed appreciation for H.Res. 199 as his country continues to recover from the horrible conflict ten years ago.

By considering this resolution, therefore, we are not working in a vacuum. By moving it forward for full committee consideration, we will have a positive effect on a country in which the United States has invested much money and personnel. We will have a positive effect on real people who went through something it is frankly hard to talk about.

Finally, July 11 is the date that this massacre will be commemorated. Legislatively, that does not give us much time. I therefore hope I can count on bipartisan support as this resolution moves forward.